

Panther Recovery Implementation Team (PRIT)
Transportation SubTeam
Meeting Minutes

November 1, 2019

Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) District 1 Office, Bartow, FL

Attendees:

Meredith Budd
Amber Crooks, Chair
Katasha Cornwell
Elizabeth Fleming, Core Team Liaison
Don Scott
Brent Setchell
Dan Smith
John Wrublik

Guests/Members of the Public:

Lee Amos
Mark Cantrell
Nikki Cribbs
Nicole Monies
Tom Pride

Welcome and Set Agenda

Update by Elizabeth

- USFWS busy with panther Species Status Assessment (SSA). Other sub teams are currently on hold. SSA slowed down by Hurricane Dorian. SSA committees that meet are delayed. SSA was supposed to be done by end of 2019. The neurological issue should now be included in the SSA analysis.
- On October 17, 2019 provided webinar to Core Team regarding I-4. The resulting request was for us to put together a document to highlight opportunities and constraints.
- PRIT Core Team had a call after the Transportation Subteam call. It focused on panther neurological issues.

Cost Surface Mapping, I-4, & Next Steps

- During the October 17, 2019 meeting, USFWS stressed that they would like to include other USFWS offices into transportation planning for panthers not just Vero Beach. Coordinating on a statewide level.
- Brent spoke about target corridors versus existing corridors. Where would we want to see the corridor for the best outcome for people and panthers/wildlife?
- Draft report was reviewed:
 - Dan wanted the name of the crossing sites to be clearer. For example “Western Green Swamp” could be renamed “West Hilochee WMA Osprey Unit.”
 - Elizabeth has concerns about the Florida Panther Recovery Plan verbiage.

- Dan said that there may be additional opportunities that aren't captured in the list on page 5 and doesn't like the idea of limiting it to a set list of locations. "Existing conditions don't show a corridor but there may be future potential." Should include caveat into the report that this list is not exhaustive. Amber agreed but said that it would have been best to include these additional opportunities into our prior meetings and presentations. Mark suggested language that speaks to existing and future opportunities.
- Implementation of the report:
 - Bring into the fold other entities that would have an impact on land use modifications and transportation planning. We could send them our final I-4 report and/or we could have a meeting with them or invite them to a future Subteam meeting.
 - Dan suggested Florida Rural and Family Lands to protect agriculture in the Hillsborough and Plant City area, including discussions with FDACS.
 - Brent said our meetings with Hillsborough and Plant City should include discussion about land use plans and corridor beyond I-4.
 - Amber suggested 1) finalizing the report, 2) inviting other entities to next Subteam meeting, 3) inviting land acquisition experts to subsequent Subteam meeting.
- Dan went over other ideas in the Hiloochee WMA Osprey Management Unit area and Saddle Creek area.
 - Dan had a map that showed the areas that FDOT looked at during evaluation of that area. Dan had slides that showed his recommendations, which included multiuse overpass near cattle crossing. Brent and Katasha spoke about overpass touchdowns are outside the ROW, as opposed to underpass which would be able to stay in the ROW. Brent expressed concerns with obtaining the needed ROW and the potential issues associated with impacting 4F properties and/conservation lands associated with an overpass.
 - Dan asked what the substrate was for the crossings proposed for the shelves. Currently proposed is sandbag to assist with erosion. Dan wanted to see more natural substrate to assist with other wildlife species, including fossorial species.
 - Dan said that with limited opportunities along I-4 that we should be providing dry crossings. Brent said that FDOT is providing dry crossings for the 8' clearance for 10 months out of the year and that the remaining months of the year would be a 7' clearance.
 - Cross Florida Greenway overpass could provide somewhat of a template for Saddle Creek crossing. It has high walls and high planter boxes to assist with horse use. For wildlife use, would not necessarily need to be as wide; in lieu, there should be more cover.
- Amber inquired if the Core Team report should include additional crossing ideas in our description of opportunities in the Green Swamp/Hiloochee.
 - Brent said that there was a commitment for three crossings in the EA FONSI for Polk County along I-4. Exact language: "FDOT is committed to provide the opportunity for wildlife corridor enhancement by constructing low-level bridges at three locations in Polk County."

- Katasha suggested not identifying specific location. Amber suggested including the whole I-4 segment in that area to be included in the report.
- Katasha was concerned to include in the record that it did not necessarily commit FDOT to future structures.
- Mark suggested criteria for making priorities.
- Amber suggested that we include all ideas but label what has been planned/opportunities and which have been evaluated or presented to the Core Team (i.e. Plant City locations and Hilochee area additions).
- Amber can include updated report draft with conservation lands and Florida Forever projects in close proximity. Amber will need shape file of Rural and Family Lands locations.
- Amber suggested that the list be as inclusive as possible even if the opportunities aren't as viable as others.
- November 15, 2019 COB to provide track change edits to me and then Amber will recirculate.
- Dan gave an update on the least cost report, regarding reworking of land cover types.
 - There was some discussions about the destination locations.
 - Dan looking at finishing the report around November 18, 2019 and providing the Subteam for review.
 - Brent and Meredith would like to see destination in Ocala National Forest. Dan will add to the model run after the PRIT Core Team provides feedback.
 - There was a question from Lee Amos about taking into account mining reclamation.

Sharing of Information

- Hurricane fencing repair update.
 - Previous contract was extinguished. Beginning a new contract and will be executed November 7, 2019. New contractor will finish up the work. Asset maintenance contractor has been propping up fencing in the interim.
- Eastern Collier Multiple Species HCP
 - Meredith said USFWS still reviewing.
 - Amber said that Chuck Kelso of USFWS said that the applicant has provided new information and may be submitting additional information, so any time that occurs, the USFWS internal Biological Opinion gets delayed.
 - Meredith said that RLSA hearing occurred last week at Collier County level.
- SR29 widening
 - Segment from Oil Well north is in design. Pedestrian features are being worked on.
 - EAG meeting forthcoming, no date has been provided as of yet.
 - Stakeholder meeting for February 2020 for regional stormwater treatment for segments between Oil Well Road and Immokalee.

MCORES update

- Don and Elizabeth were not on the call at the same time.
- Elizabeth provided an update that the MCORES task force met this week.

- Avoidance, minimization, mitigation, and enhancement were discussed. General discussion during the meeting were to avoid existing public lands, avoid federal and state listed species (particularly endemic species in the Lake Wales ridge). There was some discussion at the MCORES meeting about the lack of feasibility study or needs analysis. No build is a viable alternative.
- Brent shared that the MCORES webpage has a great mapping tool.
- Meredith asked if there was an opportunity to provide Task Forces a presentation by the Subteam about our work.
 - Elizabeth said that all of our work should be taken into account in this process.
 - Mark had meeting with Will Watts and they are beginning to coordinate.
 - Dan reported that there was a call for missing data sets to be presented.
 - Mark was going to get with the Subteam to get updated information that should be taken under consideration.

FWF/FDOT wildlife crossings manual

- There is a technical advisory group formed. This group is composed of reps of FDOT, FWC, FWS, FWF, and Defenders of Wildlife. The goal is to have a broad consensus for use by agencies.
- First step was ID target species. Goal is to have a product complete in two years. Dan said that the project includes additional work, including model to ID wildlife hotspots on roads and prioritize those; and to do an inventory of existing structures and their current utility as wildlife crossings.
- Amber asked about the FWF/FDOT hotspots and how it compares to the Subteam's hotspots report? Dan said it is largely different because it is not focused only on panthers.
- Amber asked if the TAG meetings are open to the public. Katasha said no they are not. Dan said that the Subteam was fairly well represented. Amber said Conservancy of Southwest Florida may be interested in participating if it were open to others and/or the public, and that there may be other stakeholders who would have an interest. Katasha and Meredith said that they may share with the Subteam during the process.

I-75 hotspot in Lee County

- Meredith mentioned that there was a Lee County hot spot along I-75 south of Corkscrew Road near the Larry Kiker preserve. Amber can send the coordinates for that mortality. FWC expressed concerns about having fencing on just the east side. The cost was approximately \$850,000 for two miles of fencing on both sides of I-75. There were some other alternatives also assessed that were a bit less costly.

Collier County bridges

- 6 bridges were thought of for shelves for panthers but had too low of clearance. The current clearance is 2.5' vertical and about 6" above seasonal high. They are in 60-90% design. Collier County may be willing to revise two of the bridges to a better design that will be more functional for wildlife: #030141 on Immokalee Road and #030158 on County Line Road.
- Four of the six bridge replacement areas overlap with USFWS priorities for improvements in eastern Collier.

- Amber asked why they selected #030141 and not the bridge that was closer to the Citygate crossing? Meredith said that the grade was easier to accomplish on #030141 and Dan said that location is very wet.

I-4 Discussion cont.

- Additional roadways to review that may interfere with potential Hillsborough Wildlife crossing and Plant City crossings:
 - English Creek crossing on County Line Road and it crosses it twice
 - US 92 parallel to I-4
 - West of Plant City County Road = 574 MLK Blvd
 - South of = State Road 60
 - North of = E Sam Allen and CR W Knights Griffin Rd
 - West of Plant City = Sydney Rd
- Saddle Creek area
 - State Road 33 Commonwealth Ave
 - Old Polk City Road - signage may suffice?
 - South = University Blvd
 - Additional conservation lands needed
 - Saddle Creek Rd
 - There are existing shelves on US 92 (4-5 vertical clearance)
 - Railroad
 - There is a bridge at Main Street CR 542
 - Polk Parkway SR 570. There is a bridge that has a camera.
 - State Road 540 no crossing or structure
 - Ernest M Smith and Old Bartow Eagle Lake Road local roads that don't have any structures
 - US17 crossing has bobcat and overflow structure on 60 had bobcat
- Green Swamp/Hilochee area
 - To the south US 92, Auburndale and Lake Alfred are a substantial barrier
 - Further south are SR 544 and SR 542
 - To the east is the quickly developing US 27 corridor
 - Eastern Green Swamp right up against the US 27 ridge
 - East could circle back to least cost pathway that uses SFWMD lands
 - County is 4-laning CR 557
- Reedy Creek
 - South= Celebration Blvd - already under construction
 - Osceola Polk Line Road
 - US 17-92
 - Poinciana Parkway - one long bridge - could be fairly dry
 - Cypress Parkway - 580
 - North = County Road 530/192
 - Osceola Parkway - there is a bridge
 - West Way has long bridge
 - Biggest problem is 429 toll road
 - US 27
- Brent will look into what state roads have projected planned.

- Subteam members will check Capital Improvement Project for Orange, Osceola, Polk, Hillsborough, Lake - Meredith (Hillsborough, Polk), Amber (Orange and Osceola), Elizabeth (Lake) for status of these other roadways.
- Elizabeth suggested to submit initial document and then do adjacent roadways in a subsequent document.
- Edits on I-4 report due by November 15, 2019.

Hot Spots methodology

- Brent provided an intro that went over our recent hotspots discussions with the goal of coming to a consensus on the methodology by the end of December 2019 to be able to provide a new report in early 2020. Nikki Cribbs provided a discussion on various alternative methodologies.
- Alternatives:
 - Could reduce the data set to 20 years.
 - Keep the full data set but change the buffer from 1 km to 500m.
 - Include a time factor "rate." This would produce a number that is the number of collisions in the hot spot segment divided by length multiplied years in the data set. Mortality per segment per year. Versus Dan's suggestion to calculate mortality per data set totals.
 - Use current methodology but add a "distance intensity gradient."
- Elizabeth asked about Keri Road. It appears that with this segment would end up being an orange and a green split.
- Amber inquired if anyone knew why Darrell Land had selected 1km as the model's original buffer.
 - Meredith would consider the alternative that changed to 500m.
 - Brent would consider the alternative that changed to 500m, but in future years it may end up being several red segments.
- Dan suggested dividing the road into smaller segments and then doing the number of collisions per kilometer per year.
 - Brent asked Dan to write down his methodology.
 - Meredith inquired about where to start and end when doing the segment. There was a concern about demonstrating a color when there was no collision segments.
 - In January, FDOT consultant is scoped to do the Hotspots reup.
 - Dan will do an example of his methodology via email prior to January 1, 2020.

There was no public comment.

Next meeting: Agenda could include least cost report, hotspots, I-4 and inviting other entities. Dan would like comments back from Subteam around the holidays.

Next meeting is scheduled for: January 28, 2020 from 10am-3pm.